

the years after the 1803 Louisiana Purchase—thanks to massive immigration and the social, political, and cultural shifts of the early market economy—a diverse colonial town became a modern “Creole capital.” Nathalie Dessens contends that Boze’s letters reveal a city defined “less in terms of ethno-cultural rivalry” between French and Anglo-American residents, as some emphasize, and instead by “increasing interaction, mingling, and, ultimately, possibly, Creolization” (p. 3).

Dessens weaves a complex urban and Atlantic history in six accessible chapters. The first provides the Atlantic biographies of Boze and Ste.-Gême, Frenchmen of the Saint-Dominguan diaspora who settled in Santiago de Cuba in 1803 and, upon expulsion, sailed together to New Orleans in 1809. Ste.-Gême returned home to Bagen in 1818 but kept commercial and personal ties to New Orleans (including his wife’s Gentilly plantation and the children he fathered with a Saint-Dominguan free woman of color). Boze wrote to keep Ste.-Gême up to date on those and other matters. Dessens uses those letters to chart the city’s shifting environmental history and infrastructural improvements; the interdependent expansion of slavery and capitalism; skyrocketing immigration from Europe (including, notably, France); and, ultimately, the emergence of a dynamic and diverse society. Those shifts, Dessens contends, led to a population that was far more diverse than the French and Anglo-American binary would suggest. The local population’s linguistic, national, and spiritual diversity and their active collaboration, cooperation, cohabitation, contestation, and cultural exchanges shaped what remains a unique city.

Dessens’s book raises key conceptual and methodological questions. Boze’s letters certainly form a unique archive that will be of use to scholars of New Orleans. Her close analysis allows for funny moments, such as when in 1830 a grumpy Boze complains about the youths who went to church “to have fun criticizing people’s outfits, to play mischievous tricks, and to ridicule the modesty of the penitents” (p. 105). However, some readers may take issue with the limited source base and its capacity to support larger claims about New Orleanians (however defined), creolization, and society. Relatedly, Dessens’s reliance on

one relatively privileged author risks the replication of his silences, which she acknowledges but does little to address. This omission then leads to jarring turns of phrase that position subaltern people as objects rather than subjects. For example, Dessens mentions the “last peaceful years before the slave rebellion” in Saint-Domingue (p. 7). Peaceful for whom? Or again, of an emergency in New Orleans she writes, “people flocked from all over the city, with their slaves”—unfortunate phrasing that suggests that people and slaves inhabited different categories (p. 49). An engagement with a broader primary- and secondary-source base might have prevented such missteps and would have added complexity to an already sophisticated study.

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Redemption Songs: Suing for Freedom Before Dred Scott. By Lea VanderVelde. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. xii, 305 pp. \$29.95.)

On his tour through the United States in the 1830s Alexis de Tocqueville noted Americans’ intense attachment to law. In their daily lives they used precepts, and styles of argumentation and decision-making that came directly from the legal system. It is no surprise, then, that enslaved people in the United States, as American as the people who claimed ownership over them, would also have law on their minds. In truth, they had every reason to think about it because law created and sustained the country’s racially based slave system. It would be natural for some enslaved people to think that just as the law could deprive them of freedom, law could confer freedom as well.

Thinking of law as a potential liberating force and having the capacity to actually use it to that end were, of course, two different things during American slavery. *Redemption Songs: Suing for Freedom before Dred Scott*, Lea VanderVelde’s deeply researched and fascinating discussion of freedom suits filed in

St. Louis, Missouri, in the nineteenth century, suggests that enslaved people's attempts in this area to use law to gain their freedom were more common than historians and legal scholars have imagined. In the kind of moment historians dream of, VanderVelde, while doing research on Harriet Scott (the wife of the famous Dred Scott) happened upon records that led her, with the aid of other researchers, to a valuable cache of freedom suits that had gone unnoticed. Dred Scott was not an anomaly: in what VanderVelde calls "a breathtaking act of faith" over three hundred people filed suit to gain their freedom in Missouri between 1814 and 1860, putting "their trust in courts and American justice" (p. 22).

Using the metaphor of "the redemption song" to characterize the suits (perhaps a tad too extensively), VanderVelde tells the petitioners' stories with great passion in straightforward and clear prose, providing information about the procedural aspects of the cases and discussing the types of people who brought suit, and why. Women brought more suits than men. The most common "triggering" event being the specter of the sale of children, as mothers turned to law seeking protection from, perhaps, the most harrowing aspects of life as property: separation from loved ones (p. 5). Some argued that they should be free because they were Native American and, thus, ineligible for enslavement based on a "decree by a Spanish Colonial governor" (p. 7). Others claimed to be free people who were just presently being mistaken for slaves. A small number made an equity-based argument that the person who owned them had promised them freedom but reneged on the deal. The vast majority of petitioners, however, based their claims on having lived on free soil. That makes sense given Missouri's place on the map that has, in turn, made "Missouri . . . important in legal history" (p. 17). On the "margins of national expansion" the territory and state had been the site of conflict over slavery since the Crisis between 1819 and 1821 (*ibid.*).

Redemption Songs is a much-needed addition to the historiography of slavery, American legal history, and the history of the legal profession in the United States. Its research and

insights will, no doubt, be mined by scholars for years to come.

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Beyond Freedom's Reach: A Kidnapping in the Twilight of Slavery. By Adam Rothman. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015. xiv, 263 pp. \$29.95.)

"Kidnapping was endemic to Atlantic slavery," Adam Rothman reminds us in his engaging snapshot of slavery's unraveling in Civil War-era New Orleans (p. 8). This is hardly the first time that abduction has been used as a metaphor for human bondage. However, during slavery's twilight kidnapping was more than a figure of speech. It was a looming reality. No wonder the African American grapevine hummed with kidnapping rumors in the early days of freedom. The hearsay echoed genuine fears.

Rothman writes about one such case: the abduction into Cuban slavery of the three young children of Rose Herrera, a domestic slave who had once belonged to a New Orleans dentist and his wife. Rather than swear a loyalty oath, the dentist fled to Havana a few months into the Union occupation of New Orleans. His wife, Mary DeHart, waited until the Emancipation Proclamation took effect three months later, in January 1863, before joining him. She carried with her the DeHarts' most valuable assets—Rose's three children—while Rose languished in parish prison on likely trumped-up charges. Two years later, when Mary DeHart returned to town for a visit, Rose pressed kidnapping charges against her. Now it was DeHart's turn to go to jail. Rose hired two lawyers to press her case, chief among them the Jacksonian Democrat turned wartime abolitionist Thomas J. Durant. Dismissed in civilian court, the case was retried by a military tribunal. Reflecting the legal limbo of the time, Union military authorities convicted DeHart of violating a seldom-enforced slave code provision that outlawed the separation of young children from their mothers. Almost another